

PAPER PRESENTED BY DR NAFISATU HAYATUDEEN, CONSULTANT PSYCHIATRIST.

Chairman of the occasion –

Distinguished investigators and prosecutors,

Members of the press,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

Healthy Living and Lifestyle modification: Issues in Mental health for Investigators and Prosecutors.

Mental health is the state of well being in which an individual is able to realise his/her full potential, able to cope with day to day stress and challenges, work fruitfully and productively and able to contribute and participate in one's community and society. These aspects define optimum mental health and not just the absence of mental disease. The World Health Organisation defined health as a state of total physical, social and mental well being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

It therefore means to have optimal health, one needs to have a balance of physical, social and mental wellness. Our lifestyles about 60% of our total health and this is the aspect of health that can be amenable to change. It can serve as a portal through which we can adapt our health to external factors. I would like to look at the prompts from the definition of mental health to address the topic today.

Firstly, we are human beings before being investigators and prosecutors. In order for one to realise his or her full potential, one must make healthy choices which include sleeping well, eating well, not smoking, not drinking alcohol, balanced exercising and being safe. These are factors that can be controlled and influenced by one. These can however serve as a focus for distress if poorly managed. For example, poor eating habits can lead to obesity and poor sleep can lead to use of unprescribed medications to remain alert. This can serve as a focus for physical, social as well as mental ill health.

In order for one to be able to deal with everyday stress and challenges, one needs to have high resilience. This is the emotional shock absorber for people, which can be exercised into becoming a very strong mind muscle, with the ability to handle many challenges. It can be done with by purposeful actions focused on improving ones mindfulness. Strategies that can be used to build resilience include making meaningful connections or relationships with people and 'higher powers', viewing crises as growth opportunities, taking decisive steps and actions toward solving individual challenges and achieving set goals, nurturing positive views about self, remaining optimistic and many other steps to improve our mental wellbeing.

Working productively and fruitfully entails utilising effective strong institutions, systems and individuals to achieve set goals. This is multifaceted as it would require inter sectoral collaborations and partnerships to bring about strong institutions. For investigators and prosecutors, a resourceful resilient judicial system is necessary for optimising productivity. A conducive work environment with all the needed resources such as financial, human, leadership, etc are paramount and necessary to achieve the goals of that organisation. The work of a prosecutor is never without the challenge of dealing with mentally ill defendants as well as dealing with mentally challenged colleagues. The rights of such individuals need to be clearly stipulated as is applicable to current times. It still seems bewildering to me that the current laws we have in this country are dated since before independence. I therefore call upon us all to support and promote the current mental health bill. This, I believe, will make the work of all investigators and prosecutors easier, which will ultimately promote their own mental wellbeing.

Burn out is also another important phenomenon in many professions aggravated by shortage of man power and/or inadequate organisational structures. We should not think since we are still able to come to work and get a job done, we can neglect taking time to rest. It doesn't work that way. The honours lies on us to ensure we take time off to reboot and refresh our minds for the long haul.

Our ability to participate and contribute in our respective social roles is also hinged on our mental wellbeing. We all know the primary unit of society is the family. We have our inner circle of family and friends before others. It is therefore important that as we go about our daily hassles of life, we do not lose focus of who is most important, what relationships to form, norm, storm through the difficulties with and continue to nurture. It has been said that one is remembered not by what he does for himself but by the impact one creates on the lives of others. The acts of helping others, being servant leaders, has the power to improve our self worth, esteem, happiness and satisfaction, which ultimately promotes our mental well being.

Many of the points I raised in this discussion about mental well being I am sure are things many have heard and may seem like cliches. These have been scientifically shown to improve mental well being. I therefore urge us all to put them into practice in order to remain sane and healthy.

Thank you for your attention.